



20/01/2021

# GMB SCHOOLS STAFF BULLETIN

## **COVID-19 ABSENCE RATES HIGHER FOR SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF THAN TEACHERS, GMB ANALYSIS SHOWS**

Throughout the pandemic your union has been raising concerns that our members are disproportionately being exposed to the Covid virus.

School support staff make up 2/3 of the total education workforce and have been on the frontline in every classroom and every school across the country throughout the pandemic.

### **Vaccine access must be 'urgent priority' as official figures show 33,000 support staff workers absent due to Covid in December**

GMB, the union for school support staff, has called for urgent occupational priority for vaccination for school workers as new figures show that more support staff workers were more likely to be absent from work due to covid-19 than teachers.

The figures, which cover schools in England only, were published by the **Department for Education (DfE)** this week.

A total of **33,267 school support staff** were absent on 17 December 2020 for covid-19 related reasons, including confirmed and suspected infections and those who were required to isolate due to exposure inside or outside school.

GMB has long said that support staff workers were at the highest occupational exposure to Covid-19 in schools, as common tasks include administration of



medicine, supporting children one to one, food, personal care together with close pupil contact whilst supporting learning.

**SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF ARE THE BACK BONE OF EVERY SCHOOL AND IT'S TIME SCHOOLS ARE MADE SAFE FOR THEM.**

1. An estimated **6.1 per cent of school support staff** were absent on December 2020 due to Covid-19.
2. This compared to **4.4 per cent of teachers** and school leaders.
3. Covid-19 absences have been higher for support staff than teachers on every day recorded by the DfE (since 12 October 2020).

The disparity was even greater in **Special Schools**, where **16.2 per cent** of support staff were absent in December 2020 for reasons linked to covid-19 (compared to 5.4 per cent of teachers and school leaders).

The DfE has said that it believes that teachers and support staff should receive occupational priority for phase two of the vaccination programme. However, no official decision has been made, and Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation advice on occupational prioritisation only mentions teachers.

**GMB is campaigning for all school workers to have access to vaccination.**



## **GMB RESPONSE**

### **Rehana Azam, GMB National Secretary, said:**

Schools cannot function without support staff, and these figures confirm that these critical workers are not getting the support they deserve.

It is not a coincidence that whilst many teachers are teaching remotely from home, lots of GMB members remain in schools, supervising classes, preparing food and maintaining school buildings.

Many of our members are performing tasks that involve a high risk of transmission, without adequate PPE, and often in poorly ventilated buildings.

Support staff are the highly skilled professionals of the education system but too often they are ignored in public debate.

The comments from Deputy Chief Medical Officer Jenny Harries to Parliament yesterday did not reflect at all the reality on the ground.

The DFE's own statistics prove this. Ministers across Government need to wake up and recognise the reality that hundreds of thousands of low-paid school workers are at high risk of infection, with devastating consequence for workers, pupils and the wider community.

The reality is that without urgent priority access to vaccinations for school support staff, the cycle of community transmission in schools will not be broken.

You can [read the full GMB Press response here](#).



## **ANOTHER DAY AND ANOTHER U-TURN**

### **WELL DONE TO GMB MEMBERS WHO STOOD FIRM ON THIS**

Daily Contact testing within schools is paused!

In a **statement Dept of Education said:**

“In light of this changing situation, we now recommend that the rollout of daily contact testing within schools is paused, other than for schools involved in further evaluation. This will enable the further detailed evaluation of changing circumstances including, potentially, lower infection rates and modelling work required to understand the benefits of daily contact testing in this new phase of the pandemic.”

## **MAKE SCHOOLS SAFE**

‘It is a legal requirement that schools should revisit and update their risk assessments (building on the learning to date and the practices they have already developed). It is good practice to treat risk assessments as a “living document” which is kept under review, especially having regard to changing circumstances.’

GMB will continue to support you in challenging your employer to make your working environment safe. It is important to stress that any member working previously under a personal risk assessment (such as staff who are Clinically Vulnerable) should have risk assessments reviewed in response to the new strain of Covid. GMB have a two-step letter process in place.

**Request for a Revised Risk Assessment** (Letter 1)

**Working from Home letter if the workplace is unsafe** (Letter 2)

This two-stage letter process will help to build added protection for you at work.

Letter 1 seeks a revised risk assessment and if this assessment is insufficient (or not undertaken) you are better protected to raise the H&S breaches and for GMB to be able to tell your employer why you feel unsafe and want to work from home.

We want you to know GMB has your back on this issue. Your GMB rep can advise you on both letters. If you are not sure who your GMB rep is, please **contact your region**.

## **PAY TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

GMB School Support Staff work under the pay terms and conditions of the Green Book, apart from a very small number of members in multi-academy trusts with whom we negotiate separately.

GMB is a recognised trade union that has been negotiating pay agreements and Covid guidance that ensure you are paid your wages.

GMB will continue to ensure no workers loses out on pay during Covid-19.

**Teacher Unions have no jurisdiction on your pay terms and conditions of work and do not represent school support staff employed under Local Government Green Book Terms and Conditions**

### **STAY CONNECTED**

1. **Contact your local GMB rep if you are worried about your safety at work.**
2. **If you do not have a workplace rep on-site consider becoming one**
3. **Pass this briefing to a non-union member and ask them to join**
4. Stay in touch with us join our **GMB Schools group on Facebook** and contact us by emailing us at **[schools@gmb.org.uk](mailto:schools@gmb.org.uk)**
5. Join a GMB virtual meeting - we arrange these on a weekly basis and will post details on our social media accounts - the next National Meeting is **5.30pm - Thursday 21st January, register @ [gmb.org.uk/makeschoolsafe](https://gmb.org.uk/makeschoolsafe)**